

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-38 (cancelled).

39. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler for coupling a first cable duct section to a second cable duct section without the need for tools, said first and second cable duct sections each having an end, said cable duct coupler comprising:

a first duct-receiving portion generally complementary to said end of said first cable duct section, a second duct-receiving portion generally complementary to said end of said second cable duct section; [and]

a releasable [automatic] locking mechanism for automatically retaining [said end of] said first cable duct section when said end of the first cable duct section is positioned within said first duct-receiving portion of said coupler; and

a release mechanism for releasing the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section positioned within said first duct-receiving portion.

40. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 39 wherein said [automatic] locking mechanism includes a plurality of barbs each having at least one arm extending into said first duct-receiving portion for resisting withdrawal of said first cable duct section from said first duct-receiving portion.

41. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 wherein said arm of said barb is contacted by said end of said first cable duct section upon insertion thereof into said first duct-receiving portion and thereby deflected and wherein application of a withdrawal force on said first cable duct section causes said barb to bitingly engage said inserted end of said first cable duct section to resist said withdrawal force.

42. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 wherein said barb includes a knife-blade edge for biting into said end of said first cable duct section.

43. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 wherein said barb includes a serrated edge for biting into said end of said first cable duct section.

44. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 wherein said barb may be alternatively disposed in a closed position wherein said barb may bitingly engage said end of said first cable duct section to resist withdrawal of said first cable duct section from said first duct-receiving portion and an open position wherein said first cable duct section may be freely withdrawn from said first duct-receiving portion.

45. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 wherein said barb is in an unstressed state prior to insertion of said first cable duct section into said duct-receiving portion.

46. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 40 further including a barb-mount portion onto which said barb may be mounted and retained.

47. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler for coupling a first cable duct section to a second cable duct section without the need for tools, said first and second cable duct sections each having an end, said cable duct coupler comprising:

a first duct-receiving portion generally complementary to said end of said first cable duct section, a second duct-receiving portion generally complementary to said end of said second cable duct section; [and]

a releasable [automatic] locking mechanism for automatically retaining [said end of] said first cable duct section when said end of said first cable duct section is positioned within said first duct-receiving portion of said coupler; and

a release mechanism for releasing the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section positioned within said first duct-receiving portion;

wherein said [automatic] locking mechanism includes a barb having at least one arm extending into said first duct-receiving portion for resisting withdrawal of said first cable duct section from said first duct-receiving portion.

48. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler for coupling a first cable duct section to a second cable duct section without the need for tools, said first and second cable duct sections each having an end, said cable duct coupler comprising:

a first side generally complementary to and engageable with said end of said first cable duct section and a second side generally complementary to and engageable with said end of said second cable duct section; and

a releasable [automatic] locking mechanism for automatically retaining [said end of] said first cable duct section when said end of said first cable section is in engagement with said first side of said coupler; and

a release mechanism for releasing the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section in engagement with said first side of said coupler;

wherein said [automatic] locking mechanism includes at least one arm for resisting withdrawal of said first cable duct section from engagement with said first side of said coupler.

49. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 48 further including a barb cover for covering said barb.

50. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 49 wherein said barb cover provides back contact support for said barb such that when withdrawal

force is applied to said first cable duct section, said barb deflects into contact with said barb cover to provide extra withdrawal resistance capability to said [automatic] locking mechanism.

51. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 48 wherein said releasable [automatic] locking mechanism is capable of automatically retaining both said end of said first cable duct section in said first duct-receiving portion and said end of said second cable duct section in said second duct-receiving portion.

52. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 51 wherein said locking mechanism includes a barb having a plurality of arms, at least one of said arms extending into said first duct-receiving portion and at least one of said arms extending into said second duct-receiving portion.

53. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 52 wherein said barb may be alternatively disposed in a closed position wherein said barb arms may bitingly engage both of said ends of said first and second cable duct sections to resist withdrawal of said first and second cable duct sections from said first and second duct-receiving portions, respectively, and an open position wherein said first and second cable duct sections may be freely withdrawn from said first and second duct-receiving portions, respectively.

54. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 48 wherein said barb is made of metal.

55. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 48 wherein said barb includes a flange for strengthening said barb such that said barb may provide increased resistance to withdrawal.

56. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 48 wherein said end of said first cable duct section includes at least one pliable rib for enhancing the engagement between said barb and said end.

57. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler for coupling a first cable duct section to a second cable duct section without the need for tools, said first and second cable duct sections each having an end, said cable duct coupler comprising:

a first side generally complementary to and engageable with said end of said first cable duct section and a second side generally complementary to and engageable with said end of said second cable duct section; [and]

a releasable locking mechanism for automatically retaining [said end of] said first cable duct section when said end of the first cable duct section is in engagement with said first side [fo] of said coupler; and

a release mechanism for releasing the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section in engagement with said first side of said coupler;

wherein said [automatic] locking mechanism includes a barb having at least one arm for resisting withdrawal of said first cable duct section from engagement with said first side of said coupler.

58. (Currently amended) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said [automatic] locking mechanism includes a plurality of barbs each having at least one arm extending into said first duct-receiving portion for resisting withdrawal of said first cable duct section from said first duct-receiving portion.

59. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said arm of said barb is contacted by said end of said first cable duct section upon insertion thereof into said first duct-receiving portion and thereby deflected and wherein application of a withdrawal force on said first cable duct section causes said barb to bitingly engage said inserted end of said first cable duct section to resist said withdrawal force.

60. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said barb includes a knife-blade edge for biting into said end of said first cable duct section.

61. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said barb includes a serrated edge for biting into said end of said first cable duct section.

62. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said barb may be alternatively disposed in a closed position wherein said barb may bitingly engage said end of said first cable duct section to resist withdrawal of said first cable duct section from said first duct-receiving portion and an open position wherein said first cable duct section may be freely withdrawn from said first duct-receiving portion.

63. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 wherein said barb is in an unstressed state prior to insertion of said first cable duct section into said duct-receiving portion.

64. (Previously presented) A cable duct coupler in accordance with claim 57 further including a barb-mount portion onto which said barb may be mounted and retained.

65. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 39 wherein the release mechanism releases the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section within said first duct-receiving portion of said coupler without damaging said first cable duct section.

66. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 39 wherein the release mechanism is disposed along an exterior of said coupler.

67. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 39 wherein the release mechanism is actuated from an exterior of said coupler.

68. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 39 wherein the release mechanism is a fastener.

69. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 68 wherein the fastener is a threaded bolt.

70. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 47 wherein the release mechanism releases the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section within said first duct-receiving portion of said coupler without damaging said first cable duct section.

71. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 47 wherein the release mechanism is disposed along an exterior of said coupler.

72. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 47 wherein the release mechanism is actuated from an exterior of said coupler.

73. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 47 wherein the release mechanism is a fastener.

74. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 72 wherein the fastener is a threaded bolt.

75. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 48 wherein the release mechanism releases the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section in engagement with said first side of said coupler without damaging said first cable duct section.

76. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 48 wherein the release mechanism is disposed along an exterior of said coupler.

77. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 48 wherein the release mechanism is actuated from an exterior of said coupler.

78. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 48 wherein the release mechanism is a fastener.

79. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 78 wherein the fastener is a threaded bolt.

80. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 57 wherein the release mechanism releases the releasable locking mechanism from retaining said first cable duct section in engagement with said first side of said coupler without damaging said first cable duct section.

81. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 57 wherein the release mechanism is disposed along an exterior of said coupler.

82. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 57 wherein the release mechanism is actuated from an exterior of said coupler.

83. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 57 wherein the release mechanism is a fastener.

84. (New) A cable duct coupler of claim 83 wherein the fastener is a threaded bolt.